

NEA PAPHOS

EXCAVATING BELOW THE MOSAIC OF THE SOUTHERN PORTICO IN THE VILLA OF THESEUS

Henryk Meyza

The Archaeological Park project at the Nea Paphos site has necessitated extensive remodeling works involving the reconstruction of parts of the villa, the southern peristyle portico (No. 25) included. To make the portico clearly visible to the public, the stylobate remains have already been rebuilt to the original height and the fragmentary mosaic floor will be integrated in a new lime mortar bed, thus sealing off the earlier layers.

In order to study the earlier remains in the area before they become inaccessible to research, the site around a cistern opening opposite Room 38 was chosen to be excavated. Although blocked in antiquity, the wellhead had opened after the collapse of the portico floor. Excavations in 1970 revealed its position. Another entrance to this large cistern was uncovered 3 m to the east, in a trench cut across the portico during the same campaign. The cistern itself has not been explored, since it will be closed by a metal grid and therefore accessible in the future.

The wellhead was built in the corner of two walls, of which the E-W one to the north of it (S.13) was probably a continuation of the wall uncovered in 1970 near the eastern cistern entrance. The other wall is perpendicular to it and lines the east side (S.8). The wellhead consists of a semicircular parapet (S.2) on the west, and a straight wall on the south. Whether another semicircle existed on the east is not clear. The access to the cistern itself is a narrow circular shaft cut in the calcareous bedrock. The cistern is partly filled with soil and debris; the bottom is currently at a depth of 4.80 m below the mosaic.

The trench was almost square and measured 3.23 m (E-W) by 3.26 m (N-S). While the mosaic itself had been destroyed

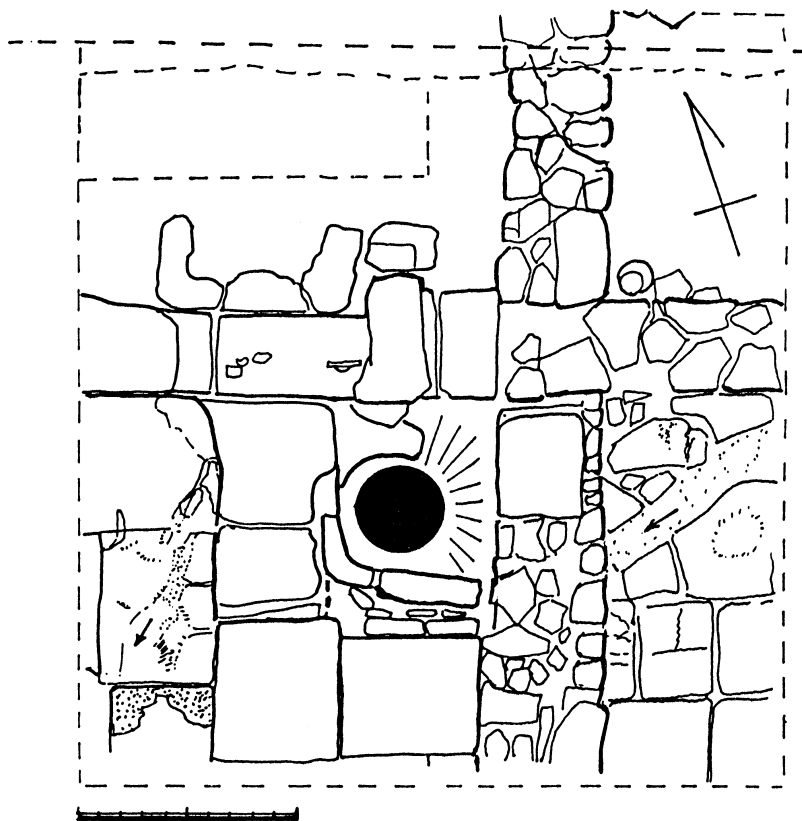


Fig. 1. Plan of a trench in the southern portico (R.25) of the Villa of Theseus.

Drawing M. Janowska, H. Meyza.

already in Antiquity, its bedding, discovered in 1970, was in fair condition; over the next quarter of a century its state deteriorated unfortunately. Consequently, the latest pieces of pottery found in a loose layer filling hole sin the mosaic bedding may be later, accidental intrusions. The best dated is a base of

Phocaeen Hayes form 1, dating to the 4th/5th century.¹ It should be noted, however, that the undisturbed bedding yielded no pieces later than the 2nd century. There are pieces of Cypriot Sigillata form P29 and Eastern Sigillata A form 51 from the Hayes classification.² A similar date in the 2nd century can be assigned to the soil fills below the bedding and the daub floors covering the pavements around the wellhead.

The daub floor on the west and south was partly covered by a layer of crushed plaster containing pottery dated to the end of the 2nd or 3rd century.³ The daub was packed with mostly very small, but numerous fragments of several different amphorae, of which one, a Pseudo-Kos *en cloche* form produced in Cilicia, was most frequent.⁴ Second in number were fragments of Roman Amphora type II according to House of Dionysos classification, identified by clay fabric only.⁵ Less frequent were pieces of Koan type with uneven greenish surface,

¹ Context: 29/96; J.W. Hayes, *Late Roman Pottery*, London 1972, p. 327; id. *Late Roman Pottery Supplement*, p. 525.

² Context: 1/96; J.W. Hayes, Sigillate orientali, in: *Atlante delle forme ceramiche II, Ceramica fine romana nel bacino mediterraneo (tardo ellenismo e primo impero)*, EAA, Roma 1985, p. 37, Pl. VI: 19-20 and p. 86, Pl. XX:8.

³ Context 4/96: base fragment of Eastern Sigillata B form Hayes 80 - Hayes, Atl EAA II, o.c., p. 69f., Pl. XV: 15; body sherd of Africana piccolo amphora, with black surface, D.P.S. Peacock, D.F. Williams, *Amphorae and the Roman Economy: An Introductory Guide*, London 1986, p. 153f; D.P.S. Peacock, F. Belauoui, N. Belazreg, Roman Amphora Production in the Sahel Region of Tunisia, in: *Amphores romaines et histoire économique: dix ans de recherche*, ColloEFR 114, Rome 1989, p. 182. Despite the rather later (than usually accepted) date suggested by this last fragment for the building of the Villa of Theseus, it is impossible to revise the whole structure of dates on such fragile evidence.

⁴ Contexts: 5/96, 10/96; J.-Y. Empereur, M. Picon, Les regions de production d'amphores imperiales en Mediterranee Orientale, in: *Amphores romaines et histoire économique: dix ans de recherche*, ColloEFR 114, Rome 1989, pp. 230-232.

⁵ J.W. Hayes, *Paphos III. The Hellenistic and Roman Pottery*, p. 91, Pl. 24:2, Fig. 70:12

perhaps local imitations(?). Fewer still were body pieces belonging to micaceous water jars and probably to amphora form Mau XXVII/XVIII. These fragments belong to vessels which were presumably broken while in use at the wellhead and had accumulated there. West of the wellhead hemicycle the pavement (S.7.1) slopes visibly down to the southwest, and a cut gutter leads in this direction. The southwesternmost slab is removed or replaced by a plastered cess-pit probably leading to a channel running southward towards the Hellenistic and Early Roman street A.⁶ The pavement is missing immediately west of the wellhead and 15 cm deeper an earlier one (S.7.3) was uncovered. The space above was filled by a rather loose fill containing amphora sherds similar to those found in the daub over the upper pavement.⁷ A lime-coated floor originally overlying the lower pavement is visible in the section under the upper pavement. The slabs of the lower pavement are made to fit the hemicycle, while south of the wellhead it was necessary to use small splinters of stone to fill the space between the slabs of the upper pavement and the block forming the south side of the wellhead. It follows that the upper pavement constituted a remodeling of the existing surroundings of the cistern.

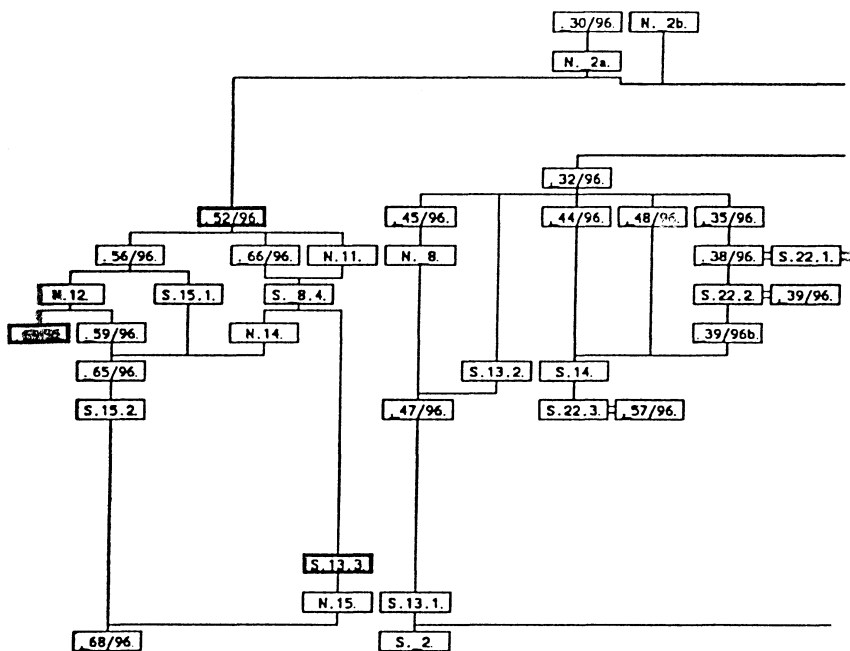
In the eastern part of the trench, layers corresponding to the upper pavement seem to have been damaged, since a lime-coated floor visible in the eastern section was clearly cut and filled with loose soil and stones. This loose layer contained pottery mostly of the 1st century, with a few pieces of early 2nd century.⁸ Remains of im-

⁶ J. Młynarczyk, *Nea Paphos in the Hellenistic Period*, *Nea Paphos* III, Warsaw 1990, p. 173f., Fig. 21, Pl. XV:30.

⁷ Context 12/96: mainly Ps.-Kos *en cloche* and sub-Koan. Tableware is represented only by residual Hellenistic pieces.

⁸ Contexts 3/96c, 8/96, 11/96 contain Italian sigillata Consp 3.2, Eastern Sigillata A foot of Hayes form 37(7), Cypriot Sigillata rim of form P11.

Fig. 2. Stratigraphic diagram of the trench in the southern portico (R. 25) of the Villa of Theseus. 



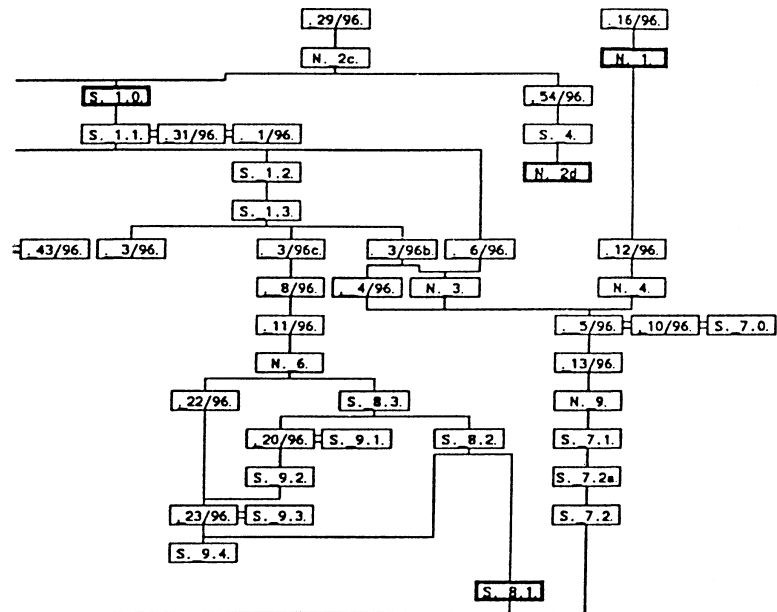
Destructive interfaces:

- N.1 Hole in mosaic S.1 over west entry to S.2
- N.2a Mosaic S.1 damage in NE trench corner
- N.2b Mosaic S.1 damage by west trench edge
- N.2c Mosaic S.1 damage along the stylobate S.4
- N.2d Trench for stylobate S.4 foundation(?)
- N.3 Damaged pavement S.7 in SW trench corner
- N.4 Cut through floor/accumulation below S.7.1&2
- N.6 Erosion(?) of upper layers of S.9
- N.8 Removal of block in S.13 behind S.14
- N.9 Cut in pavement S.7, at west edge
- N.11 Cut in N-S wall S.8.4, in east face
- N.12 Pit for cooking pot in NE corner S.8 & S.13
- N.14 Trench (?) N-S for wall S.8.4
- N.15 Trench (?) E-W for wall S.13, east part

Structures:

- S.1.0 opus tessellatum mosaic in R.25
- S.1.1 Waterproof(?) bedding with ceramic grog
- S.1.2 Leveling plaster of mosaic S.1
- S.1.3 Bedding for mosaic of fist-size stones

- S.2 Cistern below R.25 - wellhead
- S.4 Stylobate of south portico (R.25) of VT
- S.7.0 Hard-packed daub floor on slabs west of S.2
- S.7.1 West pavement of rectangular slabs, with gutter
- S.7.2 Pavement west of S.2, below wellhead
- S.7.2a Plaster floor/surface over pavement S.7.2
- S.8.1 NS wall along east side of S.2 wellhead
- S.8.2 NS wall - south extension + east face
- S.8.3 Plaster & stone pier or support
- S.8.4 North part of NS wall
- S.9.1 Greenish clay floor east of cistern S.2
- S.9.2 Lime surface below silty S.9.1
- S.9.3 Hard brown daub floor overlying S.9.4
- S.9.4 Pavement east of cistern S.2
- S.13.1 Wall E-W, east of wall N-S (S.8)
- S.13.2 Wall E-W, west of wall N-S (S.8), second phase
- S.13.3 Wall E-W, west of wall N-S (S.8), first phase
- S.14 Threshold from second phase S.13.2
- S.15.1 Daub floor with hearth in NE room
- S.15.2 Daub floor - first phase in NE room
- S.22.1 Grey decayed mortar/ash? - top floor NW
- S.22.2 Daub brown floor in worn threshold S.14



S.22.3 Daub floor with large lumps of white clay

Contexts:

_1/96 Beddings of mosaic S.1
 _3/96 Fill below bedding of S.1 (+S.7.0 contamination)
 _3/96b Fill below mosaic S.1 (SW part)
 _3/96c Fill below mosaic S.1 (east of cistern)
 _4/96 Soil w/crushed plaster, >west of S.2 cistern
 _5/96 Brown daub floor west and south of S.2
 _6/96 Fill of cut N.3
 _8/96 Lower part stony fill ->east of cistern S.2
 _10/96 Daub floor south of cistern S.2
 _11/96 Lower part soil fill, east of cistern S.2
 _12/96 Fill of destruction in pavement S.7.1
 _13/96 Fill of N.9 in pavement under west trench end
 _16/96 Fill in wellhead destruction hole
 _20/96 Greenish-grey floor = S.9.1
 _22/96 Between cracked slabs, north part of pavement S.9.4
 _23/96 Daub floor w/lime wash east of cistern S.2
 _29/96 Fill of robbed stylobate trench
 _30/96 Fill of N.2a destruction in NE trench corner
 _31/96 Beddings of mosaic S.1.0 (=S.1.1-3)
 _32/96 Fill below mosaic S.1 (north part)
 _35/96 Red-brown fill between S.13W and N.2c

_38/96 Lower part red/brow fill+gray threshold fill
 _39/96 Daub floor within worn step/threshold S.14
 _39/96b Brown fill below daub in S.14 threshold
 _43/96 Decayed plaster coat/floor = S.22.1
 _44/96 Fill west of threshold S.14
 _45/96 Fill of hole after block (N.8) in S.13
 _47/96 Leveling fill below removed block in S.13
 _48/96 Fill of west wall N-S (S.8), north of S.13
 _52/96 Brown/red fill above NE floor S.15.1
 _54/96 Potential fill of foundation trench for S.4
 _56/96 Fill of pit N.12 (for pottery in NE corner of S.8&13)
 _57/96 Daub floor with large lumps of white clay
 _59/96 Transitional between S.15.1 & 2, 56/96
 _65/96 Daub S.15.1 + fill between S.15.1 & 2
 _66/96 Fill of trench N.14 - probably for S.8.4
 _68/96 Layer below floor S.15.2
 _69/96 Probable trench fill for S.13 (NE part)

Relations not shown in the diagram

N.1 overlying S.1.0
 N.2d overlying _52/96
 _69/96 overlying S.13.3
 S.13.3 overlying S.8.1

mediately underlying strata were preserved in the southern part of this cut and contained pottery of the same period.⁹ The layers rested on a pavement of rectangular slabs (S.9.4), broken and disturbed in the northern end, adjacent to the E-W wall (S.13). Across the pavement, another gutter seems to have run southeastwards. The pavement certainly goes under the plaster buttress (S.8.3), and probably also the eastern face of the N-S wall (S.8.2).

To the north the E-W wall (S.13) separates the paved area around the wellhead from the two partly uncovered rooms divided by the northern continuation of the N-S wall (S.8). It seems necessary to differentiate two phases in the E-W wall. Its western part has a clearly preserved leveling foundation course built of large masonry blocks (S.13.2), while the eastern part, as well as the northern part of the N-S wall, was built of small irregular stones (S.13.1), and could have belonged to the fill of a narrow foundation trench, typical of Cypriot architecture in Roman times. The top of the masonry leveling course is situated lower than the earlier pavement (S.7.3) and bears cuts which may have been made for a door bolt (on the east) and perhaps a support for a door jamb (on the west, only 8 cm long). It seems that in the later phase, corresponding to the upper pavement, the same place where this door had once been located was also used as a passage: remains of a very worn threshold were found at a higher level, that is, north of E-W wall. Just east of it the support of a door jamb was uncovered. The door had opened northward in both cases. It seems possible, therefore, that this door gave access from a paved courtyard with a cistern to one of the rooms, probably of household character, with two successive daub floors. The later one (S.14.1) was introduced when the threshold was already heavily worn. The thin gray layer of decayed plaster (S.14.0) on top of this later floor contained pottery dated probably to the same time as the daub

⁹ Contexts 20/96, 22/96, 23/96: Eastern Sigillata A form 51, two pieces of Tripolitanian amphora, probably a piece of Mau XXVII/XXVIII amphora.

floor on the western pavement (S.7.0). It contained small fragments of Sub-Koan and Pseudo-Koan *en cloche* amphorae.¹⁰ The upper daub floor (S.14.1) contained three fragments of probably the same plate of Cypriot Sigillata form P11 and over 10 pieces of an Early Roman Red Slip jug.¹¹ This daub floor seems to correspond to the upper pavement. Below a thin fill layer, yet another daub floor with a large number of light grey/greenish clay lumps contained pottery of the late 1st - early 2nd century: three joining pieces of Cypriot Sigillata form P40-P42, and a piece of form P22 or P29.¹² A mortarium with dark grey section and brown surface, and inclusions of quartz and dark grey grains poses a problem. If identified as a Syrian product (a North Syrian provenance cannot be excluded), it should not be earlier than the mid 3rd century.¹³ The mortarium and some of the residual Hellenistic amphora sherds bear blackening on the breaks. Until further analysis proves otherwise, it seems better to treat this mortarium as different from the Syrian Late Roman series. At the bottom of the daub, a squared marble palette was found.

The interior of another room east of the N-S wall was found in the northeastern corner of the trench. A homogeneous fill extended from the level of the mosaic to below the level of the preserved walls. Below it, another fill, reaching down to a daub floor (S.15.1) with a hearth(?) in the northeastern corner, is more silty and the pottery

¹⁰ Contexts: 38/96, 43/96: cf. note 4.

¹¹ Context: 39/96: Hayes, *Atl EAA* II, o.c., p. 82f, Pl. XIX:2,3; C. Abadie-Reynal, *Ceramique romaine*, in: *La nécropole d'Amathonte. Tombes 113-367* II, Nicosie 1987, pp. 53-55.

¹² Context 57/96, Hayes, *Atl EAA* II, o.c., p. 88, Pl. XXI:4-7 and p. 84f., 86, Pl. XIX: 15, XX:8, respectively.

¹³ J.W. Hayes, North Syrian mortaria, *Hesperia* 36, 1967, pp. 337-347; M. Vallerin, *Pel-
ves estampillés de Bassit*, *Syria* 71, 1994, pp. 180-182; J.A. Blakely, R. Brinkman,
Ch.J. Vitaliano, Roman mortaria and basins from a sequence at Caesarea: fabrics
and sources, in: *Caesarea Papers* (ed. R.L. Vann), *JRASup* 5, 1992, pp. 194-213.

found in it should not be later than the 1st century AD. In the corner of the N-S and E-W walls (S.8 and S.13) a kitchen pot was found inside a pit. The vessel, which is early in form, was accompanied by a fragment of Cypriot Sigillata form P28.¹⁴ Apart from this piece, all the other items were of Hellenistic date. 1st century AD pieces have also been found under or in the daub floor. A fragment of an imported Red Slipped mouldmade lamp is most characteristic.¹⁵ Elsewhere, i.e., along the N-S wall, in trenches cut along the stylobate and around the pit where the pot was found, ceramic finds are dated to the 1st century BC. It cannot be excluded, therefore, that only the floor (S.15.1) dates to the 1st century AD. Numerous crushed fragments of semi-fired daub probably belonging to a daub-coated bin have been found.¹⁶ Among the pottery fragments, an early 1st century BC fragment of a closed Cypriot Sigillata vessel, late 2nd century BC Color Coated Ware bowl with inturned rim and a rim of an *orlo bifido* pan (beginning of the 1st century BC) were found here.¹⁷ This stratigraphic setting suggests that both walls were built in the late Hellenistic period, though this conclusion cannot be regarded as final, since further excavations were not possible.

¹⁴ Context: 56/96: the pot is close to AL:98 from the House of Dionysos, dating to the beginning of 1st century BC. Hayes, *Paphos III*, o.c., p. 139, Fig. 34 top. For Cypriot Sigillata sherds, cf. id., *Sigillate Orientali*, *AtlEAA II*, p. 85f., Pl. XX:6-7.

¹⁵ Context 65/96. The daub of the floor has not been separated from underlying fill.

¹⁶ Similar daub walls were found in a bin or bisquit oven: context "M" in Room 95. E. Papuci-Władyka, *Nea Pafos. Studia nad ceramiką hellenistyczną z polskich wykopalisk*, Kraków 1995, p. 212.

¹⁷ Contexts: CS closed vessel - 59/96, Colour Coated Ware inturned-rim bowl - 66/96, *orlo bifido* pan - 69/96. Cf. Hayes, *Atl EAA II*, o.c., p. 89 (forms P44-49); id., *Paphos III*, o.c., p. 27, Fig. 57:40 (Well 11:40); J.A. Riley, *Excavations at Sidi Khrebish (Berenice)*, II, pp. 248-250.

An attempt was made to locate the southern face of the stylobate foundation. However, the arrangement of stones encountered in a narrow (c. 0.60 m) trench under the reconstructed stylobate proved too fragile to be securely considered as the foundations of a large peristyle. In spite of this, it seems that the overall evidence indicates that the area was occupied later by the south portico of the Villa which remained in use well into the late 2nd century AD. Earlier structures were in use already in the late Hellenistic period (late 2nd/early 1st century BC).